

# Carotid Artery Dissection Stroke Recovery - Marco Giovannoli

Marco Giovannoli was 46 and running in when a previously undiagnosed carotid artery dissection caused a blood clot to form which caused an ischemic stroke that Marco has been recovering from ever since.

Facebook

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Macro Giovannoli 0:00

Well, yes, as once the stroke happened I was positive, and confident I would recover after a few months around four or five months is a really bad time. I struggled emotionally. I felt I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel. I started having a bit of self-pity to me. I started comparing myself to the others and it was dark. Honestly, I was dark, and while I'm still recovering from that time slowly, slowly, I changed my mood. I try to see things differently. And from that, I try to be positive honestly.

Intro 0:42

This is the Recovery after Stroke podcast. With Bill Gasiamis, helping you navigate recovery after stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 0:55

Hello, and welcome to the Recovery after Stroke podcast. If you are a stroke survivor with a story to share about your experience, come and join me on the show. The interviews are not scripted, you do not have to plan for them. All you need to do to qualify is be a stroke survivor, or care for someone who is a stroke survivor or you are one of the fabulous medical people that help stroke survivors.

Bill Gasiamis 1:17

Go to [recoveryafterstroke.com/contact](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/contact), and fill out the form. As soon as I receive your request, I will respond with more details on how you can choose a time that works for you and me to meet over Zoom. Now this is episode 261 and my guest today is Marco Giovannoli, who was 46 on the day he went for a run in the desert in his adopted country when he experienced an ischemic stroke that occurred because of a previously undiagnosed carotid artery dissection. Marco is in the process of writing his memoir, *Miracle in the Desert*. Marco Giovannoli. Welcome to the podcast.

Macro Giovannoli 1:56

Thank you, Bill. Nice to meet you.

Bill Gasiamis 1:59

Nice to meet you, too. Thank you for reaching out and requesting to be a guest on the show. Tell me a little bit about what happened to you.

## Introduction Marco Giovannoli



Macro Giovannoli 2:07

Okay, so it happened on September 8, 2022. I was running. After one hour of running. I felt dizzy I fell to the ground. I stood up again and added a few meters. I fell again and I couldn't move at all. So I had friends with me so they called the emergency response.

Macro Giovannoli 2:34

They came by the way they assessed my condition, I couldn't feel my right side at all so right away they thought they had a stroke. So they brought me to the hospital where they did a little bit of angiogram and they realized that I had a thrombosis at the left ICA with dissection of my left ICA artery. And that's it so that I had the stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 3:04

Dissection of the left.

Macro Giovannoli 3:08

Left ICA intermediate carotid artery.

Bill Gasiamis 3:13

Okay. Understand, and the dissection inside created a blood clot, or, the clot traveled or just stayed there and blocked the blood.

Macro Giovannoli 3:26

Yeah, stayed there because they could not remove it or do anything. They could not pay to steal the stent. So they tried to remove the Klotho angiogram thrombosis, but they could not didn't go away. So they stayed there a few months until then they went away, until only soon, after a few months.

Bill Gasiamis 3:46

Yeah. Do you have any underlying reasons? What might have caused the dissection? Was there any trauma to your neck before the stroke? Do you have any symptoms whatsoever before that?

Macro Giovannoli 4:02

No. I was the day before I was a little bit tired because I was a runner. So I was a little bit tired the evening before. The doctor may seem a little bit of extra extension, but they could not find any underlying reason why. I think they have no medical condition no blood pressure PRP, cholesterol anything else, and I say the only thing I felt was I was really tired the day before. That's it. Nothing more than

that.

Bill Gasiamis 4:34

Yeah. How old? Were you?

Macro Giovannoli 4:36

46 When I did that, but now I'm 47

Bill Gasiamis 4:40

Yeah, where were you living at the time?

Macro Giovannoli 4:44

I was living in the UAE Abu Dhabi.

Bill Gasiamis 4:48

Tell me about the United Arab Emirates medical system. How did you feel comfortable being there? Was it a good experience?

Macro Giovannoli 4:58

Overall it was a really good experience. I mean, here, the medical is private. As part of our working contract, the government provided us with medical support that was private and nice. I acquired medical response after I've been two weeks, two weeks at the hospital, one of the main hospitals in Abu Dhabi.

Macro Giovannoli 5:19

After I spent three months there, one of their Rehabilitation Centers here in Abu Dhabi, I had a great experience at all three events, I have to say, it's nice. They are friendly. I mean, of course, most of the Doctors who work, are not from the UAE but are mainly from the East and West of the world, but was nice for me, then the experience with them. Of course, I tried a command that he wanted to go through this one but he said I was nice.

Bill Gasiamis 5:49

Yeah, of course, we don't recommend that for anybody. But many people find themselves in this situation. Now you're an Italian living in the United Arab Emirates, you move there for work or family reasons.

Macro Giovannoli 6:02

For work. I moved here 10 years ago, for work.

Bill Gasiamis 6:07

So you are very comfortable with living in the United Arab Emirates, you're quite familiar with, what happens there, how it works, and all the things that you need to know to sort of get around.

Macro Giovannoli 6:20

Yes, yes. Yeah. And also I have a lot of local friends as well. So it was nice too and everything here.

Bill Gasiamis 6:27

Yeah. What kind of work do you do Marco?

Macro Giovannoli 6:29

I'm an Aeronautical Engineer so I work for one of the major airlines here in the UAE.

Bill Gasiamis 6:36

Okay, so that's interesting. How does the stroke impact you? When it comes to work? How long did it take you to transition out of your recovery back to work? Has that happened yet?

Macro Giovannoli 6:52

Yes, after five months, I went back to work. Luckily, I work at the office, I don't work anymore on the aircraft. I stopped working on the aircraft many years ago. So I work in the office, I lead a team of 20 people. So my work is mainly typing on the computer. Of course, now I don't have my right side doesn't work yet. So I'm typing only with my left side. And, I've everyone supported me.

Macro Giovannoli 7:13

So after five months, I went back to work. Of course, I have a little bit of trouble getting used to going back to work after five months, especially, I didn't have a problem with my cognitive function but mainly was getting used to getting back there and of course adapted that only one left and most of my work is not perfect yet. So takes took some time. Now, okay, I can almost a month, almost 11 months, and much more confident that

Bill Gasiamis 7:46

leading a team of 20 is difficult. Under normal circumstances, there's a lot of organization, and a lot of planning, what were some of the things that you

struggled to do?

Macro Giovannoli 7:58

Well, I was always someone who liked to do things on his own. So what I had to change mostly was trying to delegate as much as possible, I have to learn to delegate as much as possible. Because when you have 20 people, like I say it's not easy. And we're Interlinked on a larger scale of an airline. So we had a lot of tasks things to do with many other departments as well. So I had to learn how to delegate as much as possible. How to not do what I was supposed to do. Focus solely on my main task.

Bill Gasiamis 8:36

Yeah. Was that easy? Doesn't sound like it.

Macro Giovannoli 8:40

No, no, it wasn't easy. I'm still struggling with day-to-day, but slowly, slowly, good things I have a lot of good friends at work as well. So they helped me also to transition to this different mentality.

## **What stops Macro Giovannoli from delegating?**

Bill Gasiamis 8:53

What stops you from delegating? Do you think it's that you don't have faith in your colleague's ability to do the work the way you want it done? Or is it that you're somebody who prefers to have control? Did you learn something about yourself that perhaps you weren't aware of at that moment when you were back at work? And you have to delegate you can't delegate anymore?

Macro Giovannoli 9:22

Well, I like to do things in my way. But of course, as you said, I learned to trust people more I trust people also before the stroke, but I start trusting even more now. Because I've to accept those the way they do. Of course, they will never do the way I did things, but they are still okay also the way I do I accept what they do. So I've learned that people still can do their way. And I still I can like them on their way.

Bill Gasiamis 9:57

You can get the same result.

Macro Giovannoli 9:58

It's not easy.

Macro Giovannoli 10:00

Yes, the important is the result at the end. At the end of the day. The means can be different. That's okay.

Bill Gasiamis 10:08

Yeah, beliefs, processes, methods. If they're different, it doesn't necessarily mean the outcome won't be the same. It just means that people have different ways of getting to the same destination.

Macro Giovannoli 10:18

Correct.

Bill Gasiamis 10:20

Yeah, it's like an airplane, Marco. You go into an airplane many airplanes can take you to Athens airport or Napoli or Rome or wherever it is many airports, and airplanes that can take you their different directions, different flight altitudes, and different types of aircraft. But if I want to get there, there are a lot of options.

Macro Giovannoli 10:43

Yes, the same, more or less the same. Yeah, correct.

Bill Gasiamis 10:47

Understand? So when you moved to the United Arab Emirates, what was that transition? Like? Because you went from your hometown in Italy to the United Arab Emirates, there was this transition some getting used to being in a different culture in a different country, different language?

Macro Giovannoli 11:12

Well, before coming here, I was in Saudi Arabia and Libya. So I moved out of Italy 15 years ago. So it wasn't easy. I mean, I had to do a couple of transitions before. Well, I mean, when you move to a different country, Yes, firstly, you have to adapt to the mentality is different. So I say I've been in the Middle East, North Africa, Middle East region, for 15 years. The word is it wasn't easy to adapt, it takes some time you need to be open.

Macro Giovannoli 11:44

One takes you to be fully open. You live in a world where people come from all over the world the same you have to accept they have differences in mentality the way they do the way they think the way they speak. So that is, it's a melting pot of the world. Now take some time before you get too used to it.

Bill Gasiamis 12:04

Yeah, did some of those skills that you had from transitioning in all those different places? Over the years did they help you transition from I'll say, quote-unquote, your old version of you before the stroke to this new version of you? Has it is it a similar type of transition? Or is it something different

Macro Giovannoli 12:30

is somehow similar massively because you start from somewhere and you have to move to someone else that you are not you are not so somehow yes definitely has helped me to accept what I have now what I don't have mainly what I don't have now. I try to find the best out of what I have today.

Bill Gasiamis 12:48

Yeah. And what don't you have now?

Macro Giovannoli 12:53

Well, I don't have my right side mostly my right side doesn't work. I've still a little of a problem when I speak with the muscle on the right side of the cheek I can still feel when I speak I think I feel that I sometimes miss some words. And I don't know if everyone can understand what I'm saying.

Macro Giovannoli 13:12

Because, because of my muscle on the right, and the left. Well I like I was a runner before so I miss running, I miss cooking because I was cooking although I cook we're to one hand. But of course with one hand only is not the same as two hands. And the rest of my life I was active always outside, so that time is I tried to do as much as I could. But of course, it's not the same.

Macro Giovannoli 13:44

And of course, the least is I miss typing with two hands because I was a little bit of a programmer at the time so not able to type, only typing with the left hand one key one stroke at a time is not easy.

Bill Gasiamis 13:59

Yeah, I understand so with your deficits on your right side. Are you able to walk? where is the walking at?

Macro Giovannoli 14:13

Yes, I walk beside where I live there is a canal because I'm close to the sea. So I walk along the path now of course towards the outside. So now I'm transitioning door so static bike and treadmill. And this week, hopefully, I will go back to work outside.

Bill Gasiamis 14:33

Outside. It's very hot. How hot is it there?

Macro Giovannoli 14:37

Well, now we'll be around 40-45. With Humidity very high around 80-90% Humidity percent of humidity.

Bill Gasiamis 14:45

do you find the weather affects you differently now after the stroke than it did before the stroke?

Macro Giovannoli 14:52

Well, I feel the heat much more now compared to earlier and also the cold, like when I'm in the office with air conditioning. I feel Will the right side become a little bit numb because of the air conditioning. So they both side they affect me I think the stream they are not good at all.

## **Macro Giovannoli Running in the hot weather**

Bill Gasiamis 15:09

Yeah, 40 degrees Celsius is equivalent to 104 degrees Fahrenheit. For people listening who are not in countries that use Celsius, and they're in, then 80% Humidity must be draining. And I can't imagine what that's like, we don't get that very often here in Melbourne Australia. But does that drain you? What does that do? How does that impact you? Does it change the way you're able to use your brain and your cognitive function? Do you notice the deficit getting worse?

Macro Giovannoli 15:48

Well, drains you completely. you don't feel energy anymore, It drains you completely and leaves you as if you are a battery going empty. And with time if you work for a long time there's no energy anymore.

Bill Gasiamis 16:03

Yep. Were you in the running phase of your life when you were very active and running? Are you avoiding running during the day? What are you doing? Are you running in the UAE?

Macro Giovannoli 16:18

Well, we are running early in the morning, but around four or five o'clock in the morning, that's when I got my stroke. I got a stroke at 6 a.m.

Bill Gasiamis 16:30

And you have to get up at that time so that you can run in the cooler temperatures?

Macro Giovannoli 16:37

Yes, I mean, the evening is still really warm. So the way to do it is early in the morning before the humidity comes up.

Bill Gasiamis 16:46

Do you get any sleep? If you're running at four and five in the morning? Are you getting any sleep?

Macro Giovannoli 16:51

Well, you go too early bed maximum of 9:00-9:30 you are asleep in the evening. If you want to keep this cycle.

Bill Gasiamis 17:00

Yeah. And is that a cycle that you kept for a long time? Was that something that you did every day with all of the same people?

Macro Giovannoli 17:06

Yes, most for three years, Or every day with the same amount of people.

Bill Gasiamis 17:12

Yeah. Do you feel that your fitness and your health have helped you? With the stroke recovery? Has it been a benefit to have done all of that exercise and fitness

beforehand?

Macro Giovannoli 17:23

Well, I think so. So the doctors say definitely because I was active, I was in good shape. So they said they would help I feel that helped a lot. Of course, the muscle on my left side is completely gone. My right leg is iffier to cheat, like at the moment, but yourself. I mean, I can do exercise, definitely more than what I still can do not the same as I could do before the stroke. But I can work fewer hours at the moment. So I'm trying to build my stamina back one day at a time.

Bill Gasiamis 18:02

So it sounds like you're keen to become active again and physically fit again. Have you transitioned and tried some other sports like riding a bike with say, three wheels? With the additional wheels at the back for balance?

Macro Giovannoli 18:18

No, I didn't try until we static bike indoors. But yet, let's have some friends suggest the tricycle to try. That could be an option in the future. Because I was looking, I went back to the pool as well with the float. But because that says my right side doesn't work. So especially the arm is not easy so I try to use my as much as possible my leg to swim, yes. I want to try something different as well and see how would they go.

Bill Gasiamis 18:47

Yeah, fantastic. With your mood and your emotional state. Was that impacted? You seem very upbeat, and very positive. You seem like everything is gonna go to be okay. Did your mood and your personality get impacted in any way that was negative or not your normal self?

Intro 19:12

If you've had a stroke, and you're in recovery, you'll know what a scary and confusing time it can be, you're likely to have a lot of questions going through your mind. How long will it take to recover? Will I recover? What things should I avoid? In case I make matters worse, doctors will explain things that obviously, you've never had a stroke before. You probably don't know what questions to ask. If this is you, you may be missing out on doing things that could help speed up your recovery.

Intro 19:42

If you're finding yourself in that situation. Stop worrying and head to [recoveryafterstroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com) where you can download a guide that will help you it's called Seven Questions to Ask Your Doctor about Your Stroke. These seven questions are the ones Bill wished he'd asked when he was recovering. From a stroke, they'll not only help you better understand your condition, but they'll also help you take a more active role in your recovery. Head to the website now, [recoveryafterstroke.com](http://recoveryafterstroke.com), and download the guide, it's free.

Macro Giovannoli 20:15

Well, yes, as soon as this stroke happened I was positive and confident, I would recover. After a few months, around four or five months, I had a really bad time I struggled emotionally. I felt that I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel. I started a little bit of self-pity to myself, I started comparing myself to others.

And it was dark. Honestly, I was dark. So took a month, what was like one month while I'm still recovering, probably from that time, slowly, slowly, I changed my mood. I try to see things differently. And from that, I'm trying to be positive, honestly. But I had a really bad time. I have to say, roughly one month side.

## **Macro Giovannoli Reaching out to a psychologist**

Bill Gasiamis 21:02

Yeah, it's part of life, isn't it? I mean, you're going through something completely different. It's changed you. There's a lot of adjustment, your identity is being impacted, and you're not able to work straight away. So it's giving you a bit of a hard time and you notice that you had about a month of a dark time, did you reach out to anyone for some assistance or for some help with that?

Macro Giovannoli 21:25

Yes, I had professional help. So I contacted the psychologist and had some sessions with a psychologist, my life companion, and she helped me. She also helped me to go back into the faith because I lost faith many years ago. So I began faith and to the years. I also, try to look the life from a different perspective, I change the way to am.

Macro Giovannoli 21:54

I mean, I look forward to going back to studying because I lost studying for a long time. So I went back to study learn things, new things. And I started enjoying life. I started enjoying my family, my friends said whatever I tried, I was free to do whatever I could do or whatever limitations I went back to cooking and also with one hand. And slowly I think I'm I'm really in good shape at the moment.

Bill Gasiamis 22:24

Yeah, that sounds good. So you went back to your faith? Yes. So if you're, well, I'm Christian and I hardly ever go to church and I hardly ever went to church and I only went when my mum might go and I only went for a wedding or a funeral, Christmas, and Easter so not very often so I have some kind of faith but not a real deep faith. Is that the side of a sort of faith that you used to have and has it deepened since then how did your relationship with your faith evolve and change?

Macro Giovannoli 23:05

Yeah definitely like you said that was the same you probably even less than what you said not even a funeral or wedding I would have changed the way that I started praying more I started thinking that they can help praying helps a lot and helped me to be more positive and self-confident. I mean it was praying but also it was a self-talk to myself.

Bill Gasiamis 23:32

Okay, self-talk to yourself. What kind of things are you saying to yourself?

Macro Giovannoli 23:37

I tried to be possible myself I try to talk a lot to myself like to say that my arm will move over time. I was recovering. I will be I was, I was telling me the time that I'm a runner and I'm also an author because I can tell you I'm writing a book about my story.

Bill Gasiamis 23:57

Yeah, I love that. So what you're doing is you're telling yourself that you are still a runner even though you're not running at the moment. You're not letting go of that part of your identity.

Macro Giovannoli 24:08

Yes, yes correct. Um so that I use my right hand to say that I can jump I say that I can move my right wrist and everything is going to be fine.

Bill Gasiamis 24:22

Now with your right side, is it that you also have a foot drop? Or is it that you have that stopping you from running at the moment or is it that you have other deficits which is the deficit that specifically stopping you from running

Macro Giovannoli 24:37

my hip flexor, I don't have hip flexion and knee flexion enough to raise. I for the drop but mainly hip flexion and knee flexion that are enough to allow me to raise the foot drop to clear the ground. I can probably jock a few meters but not more than that one.

Bill Gasiamis 24:55

Okay. So do you think your faith is, is part of the reason why you've had this level of sort of approach, your approach to your identity? And do you think that faith has helped you bridge that gap so that you can remain a runner? Even though you're not running? How? How did that happen? How, what role does your faith play in the recovery and your identity?

Macro Giovannoli 25:29

Well, helped me, Faith tells me to figure out that have to look at the positive side of the event, and that things can always go well. And whatever we do, we have to believe in ourselves and our entity, I think we have to be our hero sometimes.

Bill Gasiamis 25:49

Do we have to be our heroes?

Macro Giovannoli 25:52

Yes.

Bill Gasiamis 25:53

Yeah. So faith in a higher purpose, you know, a higher being is also faith in ourselves. It's the same. Are they combined? In your mind?

Macro Giovannoli 26:01

Yes, yes. I mean, well, if you believe in something, first, you have to believe in yourself, otherwise, you will not believe in something else.

Bill Gasiamis 26:11

Yeah, I tend to agree. I think that's very similar. That's my experience with faith.

Now, I don't go to the church more often. I don't pray more often. But I do feel like the God, a God, the Spirit, whatever you want to call it. I think it's Me, in Me, part of me, not separated from me. It's not out there. It's in here. And when I have difficult moments, and I'm looking for some inspiration, my prayers are not in the traditional way that people pray.

Bill Gasiamis 26:48

But my prayers are more about being uncomfortable with something difficult for me to do or to achieve or to overcome or scare me. And then doing it anyway. And believing that no matter what the outcome is, I'm going to learn something, it'll be a positive outcome, even if I don't succeed in that particular thing, I am going to get a positive result, I'll learn something, I'll overcome a fear I'll discover something new about myself.

Bill Gasiamis 27:23

Or see more about the path going forward. Then if I stayed in fear, didn't do anything, and just stood there and was afraid, I think my faith in a higher purpose in me, helps me to continue to move forward and not live the way that I used to beforehand which created regrets which made it possible for me to be always sort of thinking that I am not capable of doing that thing.

Bill Gasiamis 28:00

It's too hard. No one is interested in my podcasts for example, no one's going to want to listen who's going to want to come on my podcast you know, I did all of those things. My faith in myself was blind faith because I'd never done a podcast before I didn't know what a podcast really was how to do it or how much time and effort blind faith in myself and faith that I would be guided appropriately by the universe or the higher purpose or the higher being.

Bill Gasiamis 28:34

Made it possible for me to continue the path and it started very very slow so I could change my identity and be someone who identifies as a podcaster all of it happened at the same time and it was faith that that did it was the glue that made it all possible I feel.

# Finding your purpose after carotid artery dissection stroke



Macro Giovannoli 28:57

Yes, in the end I think we can change, I mean, we have to find I found your purpose as well in writing. I have to say, like you found your purpose in podcasts or whatever you do. And I told you already you were one of the first things I found when actually on the internet after I had the stroke was my rehabilitation center. I was trying to find whatever possible to help me and I found your website, and your podcasts normally I listen to your podcast when I walk in the morning.

Bill Gasiamis 29:31

Yeah, I love it.

Macro Giovannoli 29:32

It helped me a lot as I think you are doing a great job with whatever you are doing. I think it's really helpful to people like me, and I'm sure many other people have the same like you said they also found new purpose in whatever I do today, and wherever I am today.

Bill Gasiamis 29:46

Yeah, that's the thing. Exactly. You just made my point for me, which was I feed all the things that you just said were not going to happen, that people who need the podcast would not find that they wouldn't think it was useful, and so on, I felt like it was not going to be me, that was going to contribute positively. But I had to

do it anyway. Because the possibility that it was going to achieve a good outcome was better. In my mind, it was better to try and maybe make a positive difference than to not try at all.

Bill Gasiamis 30:27

And in the end, it wasn't about me, it was about the other people that I wanted to help. It started with me. Because like you I was looking for support, I was looking for people to be inspired by I was looking for people to teach me and to learn from, but I never had them too, when it happened to me, in 2012, there was nobody doing podcasts, and all this kind of stuff was stuck. So I decided to do it myself. So I can be that person for me. And then I could bring people on who I would learn from.

Bill Gasiamis 30:58

But I never expected I'll be honest, I never expected people like you to reach out to me and say, this podcast helped me it was amazing, all that kind of stuff. And that's the beauty. That's the proof that I needed, that it's worthwhile to have faith in a project that you are afraid of that you have no idea how to do, that, you know, in your head, you're making stories up about why it's going to fail. And why you should do it anyway, this is exactly the reason why. So I appreciate you.

Macro Giovannoli 31:30

Well, I think he's on time to say maybe he meant it to be as simple as this, like you said, I think we have to believe a little bit more a bit than ourselves in what we can deliver as time things will happen because we want them to happen. I mean, maybe we're supposed to be so, yes, I mean, sometimes we just try to try. Let's say there are fears, we fight fears. And just try. And let's see how it goes.

Bill Gasiamis 32:00

Yeah, I think most people who are going to come across the work of, for example, a stroke survivor who's trying to help other stroke survivors are going to be very accepting and willing to encourage you and to be excited by what you're doing. Because that's what we need, we need more tools, there are still not enough tools out there for stroke survivors. The problem with stroke is there's one in four people will have a stroke in their lifetime. Many, many people are going to have a stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 32:31

And we need to make tools available to as many people as possible. What I like about the podcast is that it's free for people to download. And there is a part of the podcast that anyone can access. So regardless of people's ability to pay for a service that I offer, for example, I need to pay for the podcast that makes it much, much more accessible than it used to be in the old days.

Bill Gasiamis 32:59

Nobody was speaking about in the old days, 10 years ago, there was no one speaking about these topics in such a vast amount of with such a vast amount of interviews, for example, you didn't have somewhere where you could go every single week and get a new perspective on that particular topic if you were interested.

Macro Giovannoli 33:22

That's correct. I can see it was probably 10 years ago, I don't know 10 years ago, I definitely, didn't have a clue. Every there is and your podcast helped. Because keep, like you said give many perspectives on the same subject. And it's not only people but it's also medical, I found a lot of good listening from your podcasts or books or research or your podcast. I went and searched other subjects, too, to distract myself from the stroke and possible recovery.

## **Putting your carotid artery dissection stroke story in writing**

Bill Gasiamis 33:59

Yeah. Fantastic. So tell me about your transition now. So you've been in recovery for five months, it's a very short amount of time. And already you're considering the possibility of telling your story and putting it out there for other people to learn from. So tell me a little bit about that idea. How did it come to be that you should put this thing in writing?

Macro Giovannoli 34:24

Well, because it mainly was part of the emotional struggles the book is of course about what happened to me, but merely my emotional struggle and the way I overcame it. So it's merely a journey of self-discovery after a stroke. So that's how it came out. So because I have people that they suggested me to do it. support the idea that, that should prove these things and writing because I could help a lot of

people, to see how we can we can take up their life after stroke.

Bill Gasiamis 35:04

Yeah. And that, that the process of writing, do you find that part of it is helping you heal? Is it putting the word out of your mind and body in your head and putting it into a book? Does that kind of help? Is it like an exorcism? Does it help you get that stuff out? How does it also support us?

Macro Giovannoli 35:33

Yeah, that is sort of cathartic sensation means you are healing yourself and putting your thoughts in words. Because when you're going to read your word you are going to see things a different way. So I could see my path to what happened to me, mainly my emotional struggle there, I could, I could distance myself from them a little bit and see them with a different perspective afterward.

Macro Giovannoli 36:00

So it's a really good thing to write down, I suggest to everyone to write down it's a little therapeutic and somehow, is suggested by many psychologists to write down and helps a lot to distance it from all for yourself.

Bill Gasiamis 36:16

Yeah, it seems to create a little bit of distance as well from the event. And it kind of places it in the past where you're reflecting on it, you're not reliving it. And for me, that's what I found that it was doing when I was talking about my part of the recovery story in the book, which I'm editing right now. It's a long process. By the way, writing a book, and I'm editing it right now.

Bill Gasiamis 36:42

It felt like it created more distance between me and the events that were very, very difficult for me to deal with and live with. Do you find a similar experience? Is it doing that for you? Even though you're still five months into recovery?

Macro Giovannoli 37:01

Yes, no, I'm 10 months at the moment. Yes. put a little bit of distance is like being the third person that can see things and interpret them.

Bill Gasiamis 37:11

and you're observing the situation rather than living the situation all the time?

Macro Giovannoli 37:16

Yes, yes. Yeah

Bill Gasiamis 37:18

Yeah. The third person that's a great way to put it that's exactly what I experienced. So at work, how have you I know your colleagues have been supportive. But have they ever come across somebody who's had a stroke? Was it a big shock to them? How did they manage to deal with and speak to you about what happened to you or isn't that happening much?

Macro Giovannoli 37:42

Well, was a big shock for most of them, most of my friends and colleagues. Yes, they took their time as well to adapt to the situation I said, Everyone tried to build a positive with me since day one, trying to support me to say that things will go well and to help me with everything. But of some of them of course they have the experience in their family and friends a large audience that was new for most of them, for most of people so most maybe were shocked would happen me.

Macro Giovannoli 38:14

Because like I say, everyone will say I was fit. So it was really strange that happened to me. So they say okay, it's happened to him that was fit, it could happen to everyone every any day. So took some time for them as well. They're been positive and supportive of me every day in the work that I do. They even hold my hand every day since they happen. They are part because they encourage me to have people and support people around me. They can help you. They can accept they give you a shoulder when you need to cry.

Macro Giovannoli 38:53

They help you when you have some doubts, so they help you to see things differently. And they helped me a lot at work. A couple of friends they're my close friends at work. They helped me to see the work in different ways to adapt myself also the new style of work.

Bill Gasiamis 39:10

Okay, so everyone is.

Macro Giovannoli 39:12

So I think that the outcome is that you need to have a circle of support. I mean you can be at work and be at home everywhere. They are really helpful. To have

someone that you can speak to, they can give you advice, they can also let you see your words differently. It's a sort of writing your friend. They are there. You can speak with them and they can assess what you are saying so they can tell you if you are saying good or bad or maybe you are not absolutely 100% on the right track.

Bill Gasiamis 39:44

Yeah. Is a lot of your family here with you in the UAE or did you live a lot of your family back in Italy? Who do you live with at the moment?

Macro Giovannoli 39:58

Well, I'm separated from Italy, so I live at the moment with my current life companion. So my son is studying abroad at the University in Holland at the moment. And I don't have, I actually except my friends, my life companion, we I, I have no one here.

Macro Giovannoli 40:17

So as soon as this stroke happened my sister came also my ex-wife came to support me for the first two weeks. And after that, my parents came from Italy, they had been with me for six months before they went back to Italy. After the summer started here they went back to Italy. And I got the feeling to continue my life with my life companion here too. So that's it?

## **Support from family and friends of Macro Giovannoli**

Bill Gasiamis 40:43

Yeah, it's amazing to have all the support from the family back in Italy.

Macro Giovannoli 40:50

Yes, I mean, I say, it's really important to have someone that can support you. So you can talk you can even cry sometimes, because I cried a lot. I told you at a bad time. You need someone who can tell you good words, I can accept the way you say it. I mean, they don't judge you. They simply accept what you're saying. When you are down accept you are down and when you're up they accept you are up. They accept you're up and down. I mean, the other end is like a roller coaster. We don't decide which type of ride we have to do.

Bill Gasiamis 41:22

Yeah, absolutely. It is a roller coaster, that's for sure. I also cried a lot. And I still cry sometimes about I don't know things that bother me that I'm triggered by there. But that has decreased. So I think I'm a little more sensitive than I used to be. And I am not afraid to express it for sure. Crying in front of the family is a difficult thing for some family members. Because they don't like to see you cry. They think it's a terrible thing. Or they don't understand exactly what's happening. And they judge, the judge the crying.

Bill Gasiamis 41:58

They don't judge me necessarily, but the crying makes people uncomfortable. But that's okay. Most people get over it. So you're, it's interesting, you know, to listen to your story. And to be, because I was at home with everybody here. And they came around me very very quickly. There was no change in my life. The hospital is very close to my house. I don't have a I'm very familiar with the location with the doctors with all of that type of thing. Did you have a navigating the medical system?

Bill Gasiamis 42:40

I imagine that you didn't have much time spent navigating the medical system in the UAE or other countries beforehand. It seems like you're fit, you're healthy, you're well, you wouldn't have spent a lot of time. Was that a difficult place for you to be navigating the medical system in the UAE? Or was it quite a smooth process?

Macro Giovannoli 43:04

Well, I didn't say I didn't know honestly and I have much knowledge of the UAE medical system was quite easy, because I see Yeah, it's well organized. So they tell you everything in advance. I'd say I've good people with me, around me that tell me to come up with the right decision for me as well to help me to make the right decision for me. That's why I didn't decide to go back to Italy to do the rehabilitation. I did it here.

Bill Gasiamis 43:35

Yes. Okay. How fast.

Macro Giovannoli 43:36

Because the level of service is higher. Unfortunately

Bill Gasiamis 43:41

Okay. Are you still an Italian citizen?

Macro Giovannoli 43:45

Yes I am.

Bill Gasiamis 43:47

Yeah. Okay. So would have been very easy for you to go back there and settle in, for example, maybe with your parents, etc. And go through the process of rehabilitation there. But it was not necessary. You're already in good hands.

Macro Giovannoli 44:00

Yes, that is definitely. So I decided to be here because I was really in good hands already. And my life is here. So I told to them, why go back to Italy to do what? I mean, I would say nearly have to go through the public system and so forth. So I prefer to be here in the UAE where it was covered by the insurance. So it's okay. It's better. I mean, I could not have gotten the same level of support that I got here.

Bill Gasiamis 44:28

Your parents. Yeah in a nutshell. Your parents would be at a similar age to mine or imagine they are in their 70s?

Macro Giovannoli 44:37

Yes.

Bill Gasiamis 44:38

Was it easy for them to come over and settle in the UAE for 6 months? how did they cope? and with you being unwell also.

Macro Giovannoli 44:49

Yeah, wasn't easy for that. There has been already my father works in aviation as well. So he traveled the world a long time before and wasn't easy for them. Like you said mainly because something was not a good way to get me here for a good reason. So that took some time to adapt especially to adapt to my situation.

Bill Gasiamis 45:10

Yeah. That was the hard part for me was navigating my parents was hard part the way emotional, they were upset and concerned. I was trying to keep a lot of the

people around me calm about the whole situation, even though it was serious, three brain blades brain surgery in the end, learning how to walk again, all that stuff. But trying to keep them calm was the hardest part. For me, it was very difficult, to manage them. I felt like it was a big job.

Bill Gasiamis 45:45

Did you feel like you had to manage people's emotional response to, your injury or your being unwell?

Macro Giovannoli 45:57

Yes, I have to try to be positive as much especially at the beginning, I tried to be positive, to show to everyone who was committed to my recovery, that I didn't have any sleep or my mental state. And like you say, try to keep everyone calm and accept the situation that it was I mean, to show them that I knew what I was going through, and I would be able to do it.

Bill Gasiamis 46:27

Fantastic. Now let's talk about the book a little bit. We spoke about it earlier, just briefly, but tell me about the book. Do you have a title for it? How far along is it?

Macro Giovannoli 46:38

So the title is "Miracle in the Desert". Because I live in the desert my stroke happened in the desert, because I was running in the desert the day it happened. And so I say it's like, it's the journey of self-discovery is about the stroke, but mainly my path of discovering myself, with the way I discover myself and what I learned about myself.

Bill Gasiamis 47:03

Is that the, Is that the miracle part, excuse me, sorry to interrupt. is that the miracle part because you had a stroke in the desert, that's not a miracle. That's terrible.

Macro Giovannoli 47:12

Yes, but the miracle in the desert is that in the desert, I learned to know myself better compared to what I was before the stroke. The stroke helped me to understand myself, I wanna put it this way.

Bill Gasiamis 47:26

It helped you to understand yourself better.

Macro Giovannoli 47:29

Yes.

Bill Gasiamis 47:30

Which part of yourself? Did you understand better the part that was getting in the way? Or the person who was resilient and able to achieve much, much greater things? Who did you discover or learn about?

Macro Giovannoli 47:43

Well, I discovered that I can be positive. I wasn't positive. Before the stroke, I was quite negative. I like I told you before didn't have much faith. So I discovered that I could have faith, I believe in myself much more compared to the beginning. And like you said I probably discovered resilience that I didn't have to have. I didn't have so much self-love, as I have today to myself, and then discover new things. I mean, I started learning and loving more things than before. I loved myself more.

Bill Gasiamis 48:25

Yeah. Did your life partner become surprised? The way that you've handled this? Have you? Have you had discussions about that?

Macro Giovannoli 48:36

Yes, she enjoyed it because she tried to be supportive of me since the day one stroke happened, She has always encouraged me to gain back to faith. And look for the help that I didn't have in faith. And she was, she's really happy. She's my support. She was the first person who told me to write the book. She's supporting me for this. She's holding my hand every step I do my recovery.

## **How far along is the book of Macro Giovannoli**

Bill Gasiamis 49:04

Yeah. Fantastic. And the book, How far along is it? Which language are you writing it in?

Macro Giovannoli 49:11

I'm writing it in English because I cannot write Italian anymore. After 15 years, I almost lost writing in Italian. So it's better in English because of the language I use every day. And I finished my first editing. So, it went to the editor just to have

structural editing. So now I'm doing the second draft after going for line editing and after I will go for publishing. I am self-publishing because I cannot find anyone to support the publishing of the book so far. So I'm going to self-publish so hopefully in a few months it should be out.

Bill Gasiamis 49:49

How long ago did you start writing it? because you now see you're making me feel bad about myself. It's taken me four years to get to this point. How, how soon how long How long has it taken you?

Macro Giovannoli 50:02

It took almost three months to write the first draft. Let's say you're worried that you find a technique to write in 45 days or 90 days. So I aim to do it in 90 days. Luckily, I didn't even have the first draft. I always liked writing but you never knew that I could write a book. Honestly, that's impostor syndrome, that was always with me. So like the stroke helped me to write, to write the book, I think there is more to be, I try to find I try to keep a schedule of writing at least 500 words every day, and from that, I build up. I mean, it's important to have a schedule.

Bill Gasiamis 50:44

Yeah, I know how to schedule because I don't I could never fit in. I struggled a lot cognitively even now, these days, I still struggle a lot. My brain has difficulty processing a lot of information words on a monitor is very difficult for me to process for a long time for many hours. So did you have any trouble in that time writing the book? Did you feel like it was hurting your brain? That's how I describe it. Doing it was so difficult and so painful that I had to walk away from it for a long time, sometimes weeks.

Macro Giovannoli 51:19

Well, overall, no, because I don't have any cognitive deficiencies. I always like working after long hours in front of the screen, I feel tired. My work is mainly more mentally tiring. So keeping the work with writing at the same time is tiring mentally I have to say. As you said, sometimes as well, there are days I could not write at all so I'll just leave it there. I took it down maybe after a couple of days I will live without my site for a couple of days until I can refresh my mind. And continue writing.

Bill Gasiamis 51:59

So you definitely would write most days, 500 words per day, after you've been at work all day? already?

Macro Giovannoli 52:10

Yeah, yes. I will write early in the morning most of the time.

Bill Gasiamis 52:15

has that replaced your jogging?

Macro Giovannoli 52:18

Yes, most of the time, yes. I mix it with exercise because I what I will do, I have a structure stationary back beside my table I have, right? So we'll do like 10 minutes by the intermediate writing, I will go back and forth from one to another.

Bill Gasiamis 52:35

Yeah, that sounds like an awesome thing to do, I decided to write my book in the middle of one of our very long COVID lockdowns, which was, for us it was we were locked down in Melbourne here in Australia, from 2022 to sorry, from 2020 to 2022. For most of the two years, we were in some kind of lockdown.

Bill Gasiamis 52:58

And I'm not sure what it was there, I read that I found something on I Felt Something online, which mentioned one of the pandemics that happened 100 years ago and one of the famous authors and I don't even know whose name it is, I've forgotten completely who the people were in the story. But during the pandemic, in the early 1900s, I think it was called the Spanish flu or something like that.

Bill Gasiamis 53:25

He went to the farm, he stuck himself in his cottage. And he wrote his book and didn't come out for two years or something like that, to escape the big challenges that the flu or the pandemic was creating. So that's, that was my idea. That's how I got the idea to sit there and write it. Previous to that I had done, I had done the research. So I spent around two years developing the idea. And then interviewed the people who helped form the book, who created the background for me to be able to share the story the way that I'm sharing it.

Bill Gasiamis 54:09

So that whole before writing, the book started it took about two years. And then I finally decided on the pandemic. Because we had so much spare time on our hands, we were at home all the time, we weren't allowed to work a lot. And as a result, I filled my time like that. I think it helped me get through all those lockdowns and all the challenges of the pandemic.

Bill Gasiamis 54:35

And when we went back to work, finally, the book took a backseat. Because we were back at work and there was less time in the day. And that's when I found that really difficult to write because I had already been to work for the day, very tired, and fatigued, and then I had to write and I didn't like what I was writing. And I had to redo it a lot of times. So it was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. It was hard writing this book.

## **The hardest part of writing the book for Marco Giovannoli**

Macro Giovannoli 55:08

But it's not easy writing, I said, I told you already, there have been days that had to leave the book away from me because I could not write a single word after another. So I will take it that way, it's not easy. Takes a lot of commitment, I guess. I mean, that I am a memoir, mine is a memoir. So definitely is a lot of self-reflection, like I told you before, it's like seeing my life from a third person from a distance away, from a larger, larger point of view.

Bill Gasiamis 55:45

Yeah. And it's also going to support and help other people, which is fantastic.

Macro Giovannoli 55:50

Well, they missed that one. I hope that my story may help someone else. They could find some way also they could approach the ways the same way that you are doing with your podcast. I mean, that's the end.

Bill Gasiamis 56:07

Yeah, I love it. So recently, I started asking people who listen to the podcast this question. So you're being interviewed on the podcast, these two questions. And I want to get a bit of insight from a large number of people as to what they think

about these questions. So I want to ask you the first one before we wrap up. I want to know, what has stroke taught you? I know we've spoken a little bit about all the different things, but is there a deeper underlying lesson that you've learned from this stroke?

Macro Giovannoli 56:47

Well, that we have, we are more resilient. The power of, power for what we believe. I mean, we are, we are much more than what we thought or what other people think about us.

Bill Gasiamis 57:00

Yeah, fantastic. And also

Macro Giovannoli 57:02

let's say, I think we have to be like says, we have to be our superhero sometimes. We are our superheroes. Yeah.

Bill Gasiamis 57:11

Fabulous. And what would you say to other stroke survivors who are listening to this? Maybe they've just had a stroke. And like you and me, on the internet looking for information, or for stories or guidance or something. And they found this podcast they're listening to it's the first episode they listened to. What would you tell them?

Macro Giovannoli 57:36

I will tell them the stroke is about things that are not fair. Life is not fair. It wasn't fair to us. But that he could have to wear the stroke suit every day. With the most powerful, we have to be confident life is different, but can only be beautiful. Life is beautiful. In the end, we can make our life beautiful, we have to see the good way of life.

Bill Gasiamis 58:02

Fantastic.

Macro Giovannoli 58:03

Life doesn't end with a stroke. I mean, it's not the end of the world. We are not the first we are not the last. There is a way we just find our way now. It's going to be different. But it may be there is something in our life that you went for a podcast I went for a book and about both with the note that we could do. So

maybe that's what the stroke is brought to us. Different things will be there. We're both meant to be, we didn't know.

Bill Gasiamis 58:32

Yeah, different things we never expected. We didn't know. And here we are. It's possible for everybody.

Macro Giovannoli 58:40

Yeah, I mean, it is possible sometimes, like you say we have to just believe a little bit more in ourselves and not be afraid to fail because we will always fail. But when we fail like a stroke, we need to learn that we can pivot and change and move forward.

Bill Gasiamis 58:54

Yeah, fantastic. When do you expect the book to be complete and available?

Macro Giovannoli 59:01

I expect a few months before the winter starts that year I would like the book to come out. Of course, my next one would be when I one day I will be back to run because I say I want to back to, run at the ranch too. In my mind that I was going to run because I wanted to run, the K ultra marathon. So that's the so maybe that will be the second part of the book one day maybe if you have time when they will up.

Bill Gasiamis 59:30

Why not, I've interviewed some stroke survivors. One of them very early on in the podcast ran a marathon with foot drop. Donna Campisi, she's a person from Melbourne who I've met here who had a stroke. And it took her some time many many years because she was a child when she had a stroke. She was eight years old. But eventually, in her adulthood in her 40s, She did some training and got to the point where she ran In a 40 Kilometer marathon, and she wrote a book about, it called "The Unlikely Marathoner".

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:11

So it's a fantastic idea that you have there to write your second book after you run the marathon. I also interviewed an ultra-marathon runner who started the marathon, ultra marathon running after his stroke. Now, he doesn't have the type of deficits that you and I described or discussed. But he's running ultramarathons after the stroke, sometimes 70 kilometers in a marathon, sometimes 80

kilometers.

Bill Gasiamis 1:00:44

Just ridiculous amounts of kilometers. I just can't understand that. Actually. I can't even say the words. It's so unbelievable to me. So if they have done it you're going to be able to somehow overcome it, and do it and get there.

Macro Giovannoli 1:01:07

Yeah, I also spoke with some people who did after a stroke some deficiency like mine, everyone told me that after a few years, you adapt to your body get a little bit looser, and compensate for some of the deficit and you find your way to run. So I hope in a few years, I will be able to run again, so I can go on the path as well.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:32

Well done, man. Marco, thank you so much for reaching out and being my guest on the show.

Macro Giovannoli 1:01:40

Thank you, Bill, was a pleasure to join you at the show and I say goodbye ciao to everyone.

Bill Gasiamis 1:01:49

Thanks for joining us on today's episode to learn more about my guests including links to their social media, and other pages, and to download a full transcript of the entire interview. Please go to [recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes](https://recoveryafterstroke.com/episodes). If you'd like to support this podcast, the best way to do it is to leave a five-star review and a few words about what the show means to you on iTunes and Spotify. If you're watching on YouTube comment below the video.

Bill Gasiamis 1:02:15

I always respond to all the comments on the YouTube videos like this episode and to get notifications of future episodes, subscribe to the show on the platform of your choice. Thanks again for being here and listening. I appreciate you see you on the next episode.

Intro 1:02:31

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Intro 1:03:01

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Intro 1:03:26

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Intro 1:03:52

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